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ABSTRACT

Detailed reviews of two legal information databases--"Laborlaw I" and "Legal Resource Index"--are presented in this paper. Each database review begins with a bibliographic entry listing the title; producer; vendor; cost per hour contact time; offline print cost per citation; time period covered; frequency of updates; and size of file. A detailed discussion and assessment of each of the databases is also provided. "Laborlaw I," a comprehensive index and abstracting service for all U.S. federal and state court and administrative agency decisions pertaining to labor relations, is characterized as being a specialist's database. It is argued that the pervasive use of legal phraseology, extensive abbreviations, technical nature of the material indexed, and the complex file structure of this database make it most suitable for use in legal or academic libraries. "Legal Resource Index," a database that provides cover-to-cover indexing of 750 law reviews and bar association journals, law newspapers, and selective law-related articles appearing in standard magazine indexes, is assessed as being appropriate for the end-user as well as the information specialist. However, it is suggested that an "intended audience" field would be a useful addition, allowing the layperson or practitioner to refine search results at a desired level. (SD)

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DATABASE REVIEWS: LEGAL INFORMATION

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MAY, 1986

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

TITLE OF DATABASE: Laborlaw I

DATABASE PRODUCER: Bureau of National Affairs, Inc.

VENDOR: Dialog (File 244)

Cost per hour connect time: $120.00

Offline print cost per citation: $ .70

COVERAGE: Oldest subfile covers 1938 to present. Starting dates of other subfiles vary (see review below).

FREQUENCY OF UPDATES: Monthly

SIZE OF FILE: 270,800 records as of April, 1986 update

LABORLAW is a comprehensive index and abstracting service for all U.S. federal and state court and administrative agency decisions pertaining to labor relations. Labor relations is interpreted broadly to include occupational health and safety cases, and non-union employment issues. LABORLAW is the online equivalent of six BNA print services, each of which constitutes a separate subfile within the database. Subfiles and years of coverage:

Labor Relations	1966 - present
Labor Arbitration Reports	1969 - present
Fair Employment Practice Cases	1938 - present
Wage and Hour Cases	1961 - present
Occupational Safety and Health Cases	1972 - present
Mine Safety and Health Cases	1970 - present

LABORLAW coverage overlaps comprehensive online case reporter services such as Westlaw. However, Bureau of National Affairs

(BNA) editors prepare original abstracts (also referred to as headnotes) for every point of law in each new case indexed and the highly detailed subject classification system is unique to BNA. LABORLAW includes citations to non-BNA reporting services in the Parallel Citations field.

The pervasive use of legal phraseology and extensive abbreviation, the technical nature of the material being indexed, and the complex file structure make LABORLAW a specialist's database, most likely to be used in a legal or academic library. However, unlike the larger online legal services, it is not designed for easy use by the practitioner-enduser. Basic Dialog system training, plus careful study and frequent referral to the Dialog database chapter and the LABORLAW User's Manual are recommended. The first-rate help is available: The User's Manual has been well reviewed. BNA provides full-day training sessions at selected cities around the country, maintains an Online Help Desk (800/862-4636), and publishes a bimonthly newsletter, BNA Online, available free upon request. BNA also provides a two-page Quick Reference Guide, to keep beside the terminal while you search.

LABORLAW is the best single source for the specialist researching U.S. legal decisions concerning labor and employment-related issues. The abstracts are authoritative; and

the indexing, detailed and of high quality. Among the fields that can be searched: case name, case number, BNA citation, tribunal name, tribunal level, year of the decision, and, where applicable, decision number, docket number, arbitrator name, state, and case history. There is an indicator for the presence of parallel citations to non-BNA reporting services and it is possible to limit the search to either state or federal level cases.

BNA has developed a detailed, hierarchically arranged, controlled vocabulary and corresponding hierarchical system of descriptor codes for each subfile. The subject searching capacity is admirable in most respects. It is designed to allow a high level of specificity: descriptors are usually composed of a multi-word heading and one or two levels of subheadings. The descriptor codes allow rapid keying of lengthy concepts, and can be truncated or cascaded for comprehensive searching of broad concepts. The User's Manual provides a complete listing of descriptors and descriptor codes. The problem arises in the fact that there is a separate descriptor list for each subfile. To search across all six subfiles by descriptor or descriptor code, the search strategy may have to be entered six times, each time qualified by subfile code.

A second significant problem with the design of the LABORLAW database stems from the record format. For each case there is a case i.d. record, containing bibliographic data only. In addition, for almost every case there are one or more

digest records. A separate digest record is created for each significant point of law in the case in question. It includes an abstract of that point of law, appropriate descriptors and descriptor codes, and repeats all the bibliographic information. If one limits the search results to case i.d. records only, one eliminates the redundant information but is unable to print the abstracts. If one limits the results to digest records only, one loses the records of cases for which no digests were prepared, and still has redundant bibliographic information for cases with more than one digest record. At the rate of $2.00 per minute online or $ .70 per offline citation, that redundancy is costly.

Full text copies of all judicial and administrative decisions indexed in LABORLAW may be ordered directly from BNA's Research and Special Projects Division by telephone, or by using Dialorder. The Dailorder acronym is RSPD.

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DATE: May 10, 1986

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TITLE OF DATABASE:	Legal Resource Index	
DATABASE PRODUCER:	Information Access Corporation, a division of Ziff-Davis Publishing Company	
VENDOR:	BRS (LAWS)	Dialog (File 150)
Cost per hour connect time:	$102.50	$ 90.00
Offline print cost per citation:	$ .25	$ .20
COVERAGE:	1980 to present	
FREQUENCY OF UPDATES:	Monthly	
SIZE OF FILE:	258,458 records as of April, 1986 update	

LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX covers a significant portion of the English language secondary literature in the legal field. It provides cover-to-cover indexing of 750 law reviews and bar association journals and five law newspapers, and selective indexing of law-related articles appearing in Magazine Index (MAGS, File 47), Trade & Industry Index (BIZZ, File 148) and National Newspaper Index (NOOZ, File 111), and certain academic journals. It also includes citations to legal monographs and government publications. The journal list was prepared in consultation with the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL). A copy is available on request from IAC. LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX is also available on computer-output microfilm. Current Law Index is the print counterpart for the law journal subfile of the database. LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX has a significant competitor in Wilsonline's Index to Legal Periodicals (ILP), which has two more years of online coverage, but indexes fewer journals less comprehensively.

LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX is intended for the enduser as well as the information specialist. It is available on BRKTHRU and Knowledge Index, and can be accessed via Search Helper. The range of material indexed, from popular magazines to scholarly journals, makes it an appropriate database for high school, public, academic and special libraries. An "intended audience" field would be a useful addition to the database, allowing layperson or practitioner to refine search results at the desired level. Features such as IAC's practice of enriching ambiguous titles are a boon to searchers at all levels.

LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX is updated monthly. Indexing is current, usually appearing within six weeks of publication of the article. As with other IAC databases, information compiled for the upcoming update is added to Newsearch (File 211) on a daily basis. For recent years, the full text of articles from selected journals in the Magazine Index and Trade & Industry subfiles of LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX is included in IAC microfilm collections. Some articles are also available in full text online on Magazine ASAP (MSAP, File 647) and Trade & Industry ASAP (TSAP, File 648). An availability code indicates whether the document can be obtained through either of these options. However, this applies to only a small per cent of the records in LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX.

A LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX record includes bibliographic information, descriptors, and other indexing fields, full text of any captions, and, in a few cases, an abstract. LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX is indexed by author, title, source, date, subfile, named person, geographic location, case, statute, jurisdiction, article type, and subject descriptors. SIC code, company, ticker symbol, product name, newspaper column inches, illustration type, and review grade can be searched, if applicable. BRS and Dialog each provide some access points that the other system does not. In some cases, BRS has tagged as a single field information that Dialog divided into several fields. BRS provides single fields for case, statute, subject headings, and publication date. Dialog divides each of these into separate fields for case name and case citation; statute name and statute citation; descriptors and identifiers; and publication date and publication year. For the nonspecialist attempting to find information on a specific case or statute with an incomplete reference, BRS's organization of the information into a smaller number of fields may be easier to search.

On the other hand, BRS provides separate fields for captions and abstracts; Dialog combines them in one field. Dialog provides a CODEN field for citations to popular magazines; BRS does not. Dialog provides for searching by the publisher of books cited in review articles; BRS does not.

Dialog offers a database chapter that is detailed but out of date. One must search through back issues of Chronolog to learn about geographic location codes, availability codes, or the company name field. BRS's aid page for LAWS is up to date but doesn't provide sufficient detail to successfully search the more specialized fields. A LAWS database guide is said to be in preparation. IAC offers its Basic Course in selected cities, in two versions, Dialog or BRS. Training for Mead Data Central searchers is also available. The online customer service representative can be reached at 800/227-8471.

Indexing practices are reasonably good. Citations of cases and statutes, and abbreviations of legal periodical titles follow the form specified by the Harvard Law Review's Uniform System of Citation. Descriptors are taken from the Library of Congress Subject Headings, supplemented by terms from lists compiled by AALL and IAC. A combined list of the descriptors and standard subdivisions used in six major IAC databases has been published recently, titled Subject Guide to IAC Databases. It supplements Access to Access: An Online User's Guide to IAC Databases.

Author's names and names in the named person field are usually entered in the form they appeared in the original article, without authority control. Indexing by jurisdiction is straight forward when a single country, U.S. state, or international organization is involved. Problems arise in cases

involving several countries, several states, or jurisdictions smaller than a state. The geographical code field is usually more precise.

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